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Viewing cable 06TELAVIV3370, CRITICISM OVER ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HANDLING OF

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06TELAVIV3370**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06TELAVIV3370	2006-08-24 12:55	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Tel Aviv

Appears in these articles:

[not](#)
[yet](#)
[set](#)

null
Leza L Olson 08/25/2006 02:05:09 PM From DB/Inbox: Leza L Olson

Cable
Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 03370

SIPDIS
CXTela:
ACTION: POL
INFO: IPSC PD IMO RES ECON DCM DAO AMB AID ADM RSO
CONS

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:RJONES
DRAFTED: POL:MDPEARLSTEIN/RBL
CLEARED: DCM:GCRETZ, POL:NOLSEN, ECON:BMASILKO, DAO:PJDERMER

VZCZCTVI017
PP RUEHC RUEHXX RHEHNSC

DE RUEHTV #3370/01 2361255
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 241255Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5862
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 003370

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/IPA
NSC FOR WATERS AND LOGERFO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 8/23/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: CRITICISM OVER ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HANDLING OF
LEBANON WAR ON THE RISE

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones; Reasons: 1.4 (B and D).

11. (C) Summary and comment: The cease-fire in Lebanon has rapidly eroded the strong public and political support for the Government's conduct of the war and has left both Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz open to an increasingly loud chorus of criticism. Initial GOI attempts to channel criticism through a friendly commission of inquiry evoked strong protests and leave Olmert with the option of ordering a formal government inquiry or risking an independent investigation. The problems faced by Olmert and Peretz are exacerbated by coalition infighting on the budget and by political maneuvering within Kadima and Labor, while the opposition Likud Party waits for the appropriate moment to strike in an effort to increase its own support. Israelis will continue to digest and assess the outcome of the war, Olmert's first real test as prime minister, over the next weeks and months. This process will likely determine the political futures of Olmert and Peretz. End summary and comment.

Strong Public Support Drops Following Cease-Fire

12. (SBU) Following the July 12 attack by Hizballah, Israeli political leaders and the public rallied around Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and his government as they authorized extensive air and ground operations in Lebanon. Olmert's approval ratings soared and even the often-acerbic Bibi Netanyahu offered support.

13. (SBU) As pressure from the international community for a cease-fire increased and hostilities came to an -- at least temporary -- end, this situation changed. Embassy contacts and the media are all skeptical that the war has removed the threat or resulted in anything but a minor setback for Hizballah. To many, this result is inadequate compensation for the approximately 180 Israelis (including 110 soldiers and more than 70 civilians) killed in the conflict, the disruption of economic life from rocket attacks and the call-up of the reserves, the high financial cost of conducting the war, the destruction of homes and businesses in parts of northern Israel, and the failure to obtain the return of kidnapped IDF soldiers.

Olmert Likely to Form a Commission of Inquiry

14. (SBU) The emerging criticism is exacerbated by a public debate over the government's planning and conduct of the war. A small but vocal group of reserve soldiers have called for the resignation of Olmert, Peretz, and IDF Chief of Staff LTG Dan Halutz. They blame the political leadership for what they say was a grave underestimation of Hizballah's capabilities and for a failure to provide Israeli troops with

the necessary equipment and, in isolated incidents, even sufficient food and water.

15. (SBU) Such charges played a role in leading Peretz to form a commission led by his advisor, former IDF Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, to examine the conduct of the war. This idea, however, drew fire from both the IDF -- which wants to guarantee the confidentiality of any military witnesses -- and much of the public -- which objects to an investigation led by a Peretz supporter -- and the commission has suspended its activity. As he faces increasing pressure for a more independent investigation, Olmert has two choices: a governmental inquiry over which he would have substantial influence, or an independent commission. While the latter option would be more acceptable to the public, any potential findings of mismanagement or lack of planning by the GOI could potentially bring down senior members of the coalition.

In a conversation with congressional visitors from Washington on August 20, Supreme Court Chief Justice Aharon Barak said that he believed such a commission would be formed and hinted that he expects to be chosen to lead it.

Coalition and Party In-fighting

16. (SBU) In addition to the public criticism, the government has also suffered from coalition infighting, as well as internal party disputes in both Kadima and Labor. Transportation Minister and former Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz abstained from the Cabinet vote on the cease-fire, calling UNSCR 1701 "less than satisfactory." More importantly, FM Tzipi Livni and Olmert disagreed on tactics during the cease-fire negotiations, resulting in Olmert calling off at the eleventh hour Livni's planned trip to the UNSC on September 12. The disagreement was an apparent first. Livni was widely viewed as a real asset to Kadima's electoral campaign, and her decision to back Olmert after Sharon's stroke precluded any leadership challenge at that time.

17. (SBU) Peretz faces similar problems in Labor. His performance during the Lebanon war has only strengthened criticism that he is unqualified to manage what most Israelis feel is the country's most important portfolio. Former naval chief and Shin Bet Director Ami Ayalon and former IDF Deputy Chief of Staff Matan Vilnai, both Labor MKs who see themselves as future prime ministers, have attacked Peretz in public. Former Prime Minister Ehud Barak has been more subtle in his criticism, but is building upon his image as the leader who extricated Israel from the last Lebanon war. One or more of them is likely to challenge Peretz for the Labor leadership in internal party elections scheduled for May 2007.

18. (C) The two main parties in the coalition, Kadima and Labor, have also publicly disagreed on how to finance the war. With Treasury experts now leaking war cost estimates exceeding NIS six billion (approximately 1.3 billion dollars), the coalition has been unable to reach consensus on where to find the funding. As a result, Kadima caucus chair Avigdor Yizhaki publicly threatened to end the coalition, telling reporters "the Labor Party is not a coalition partner that can be trusted. Therefore, I am going to propose to the Prime Minister that he immediately reshuffle (the Cabinet) and enter into new coalition negotiations." Note: Gabi Golan, advisor to the Prime Minister for Planning and Development told EconCouns that while the next few months will be rocky for the coalition, he does not expect the Labor members on the Finance Committee to continue to disrupt budget negotiations because, "they know that if the PM reshuffles the Cabinet their position will not be any stronger." End Note.

Likud Waiting to Pounce

19. (SBU) To further compound Olmert's difficulties, Likud Chairman Bibi Netanyahu is waiting for the right opportunity to pounce. Netanyahu was atypically restrained in his comments during the fighting, merely referring in a Knesset speech to "hitches" in the conduct of the war. On August 22, however, he told the press that "with this many inadequacies, there is no choice but to form a state commission of inquiry." Likud is also attempting to lure former IDF Chief of Staff Moshe "Boogie" Ya'alon into the party to bolster its claims to the "strong on defense" title.

Comment: Jury Still Out, but GOI Facing Difficult Time

10. (C) Comment: The conflict with Hizballah was Olmert's first real test as Prime Minister. Israelis will continue to digest and assess the outcome of the war over the next weeks and months. Their views of the war's achievements -- or lack thereof -- will have a long-term impact on his government's political standing. Local perceptions of the deployment timing, mandate, and composition of the enhanced UNIFIL force, as well as the effectiveness of the arms interdiction regime and progress on securing the return of the two abducted soldiers, will play a large role in shaping their opinion. These factors will also determine what type of inquiry on the war's conduct Olmert will feel compelled to order. In the end, Olmert and Peretz are both likely to face increasingly vocal opposition within their own parties.

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JONES